



**Department of Justice  
U.S. Attorney's Office  
Southern District of Texas**

**Donald J. DeGabrielle, Jr. • United States Attorney**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**DEPUTY COMMANDER OF NARCOTICS TASK FORCE INDICTED**

LAREDO, TX – The Deputy Commander of the Laredo Multi-Agency Narcotics Task Force, Julio Alfonso Lopez, 45, and an alleged accomplice, Meliton Valadez, 32, both of Zapata, Texas, have been indicted for extorting money from drug traffickers to provide protection from law enforcement. United States Attorney Don DeGabrielle announced the unsealing of the 10 count indictment, returned under seal on Wednesday, April 13, 2006, today following the arrest of both men.

Lopez and Valadez men were arrested by special agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation in Zapata, Texas. Lopez was arrested at approximately 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday, April 18, 2006. Valadez was arrested late this morning. Both men are expected to make an initial appearance tomorrow morning before United States Magistrate Judge Adriana Arce-Flores in Laredo, Texas.

Following the arrests, United States Attorney Don DeGabrielle said, "Although this is certainly not a proud moment for law enforcement in general, it does nevertheless underscore the commitment of good men and women to police themselves."

Lopez and Valadez are accused in Count One of the indictment of conspiring with each other and others, beginning in July 2005, to extort money from drug traffickers in exchange for Lopez using his position as Deputy Commander of the Multi-Agency Narcotics Task Force to insure the undetected passage of the drug traffickers and their drug shipments through Zapata. Four separate payments allegedly made from purported drug traffickers to Valadez, acting as Lopez' middle-man, on July 8, 2005 (\$5,000); August 24, 2005 (\$5,000); September 21, 2005 (\$16,000); and October 7, 2005 (\$18,500) are alleged. Counts Two through Five charge Lopez and Valadez with specific acts of extortion on those dates.

The indictment also alleges Lopez and Valadez disclosed information to drug traffickers that they represented to be sensitive law enforcement information; and provided a storage place to store the trafficker's cocaine. Lopez allegedly used his authority and position to direct task force officers away from areas where the traffickers and their illicit loads were located, and failed to make arrests or seize the contraband or the drug proceeds.

A conviction for any of these offenses (18 U.S.C. § 1951) carries a maximum penalty of twenty (20) years in federal prison, without parole, and a \$250,000 fine.

In Count Six, Lopez and Valadez are charged with conspiring with each other and others to possess with intent to distribute more than five kilograms of cocaine, beginning in from July 2005. Counts Seven through Ten charges both men with the attempt to aid and abet the possession with intent to distribute kilogram quantities of cocaine associated with the payments made on July 8, August 24, September 21, and October 7, 2005. A conviction for any of these offenses (21 U.S.C. 841, 846) carries a mandatory minimum penalty of ten (10) years in federal prison, without parole, and a maximum of life imprisonment. The maximum fine in the event of a conviction of any these counts is \$4.0 million.

The indictment is the result of the investigative efforts of agents of the Laredo Resident Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney John Kinchen.

**An Indictment is a formal accusation of criminal conduct, not evidence. Defendants are presumed innocent unless and until convicted through due process of law.**

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